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6 May 1953

25X1A2g COUNTRY: Korea.
SUBJECT: Korea/Education
PLACE ACQ: - - - - 25X1X6
DATE ACQ: [REDACTED]
DATE OF INFO: Nov 52 & Earlier.
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SOURCE DESCRIPTION: [REDACTED]

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1. Chosun Christian University has passed through a very difficult period, having been destroyed three times in recent years by Japanese and North Korean forces. The University has been moved from Seoul to an island off the southeast coast of Korea, near Pusan, where temporary buildings somewhat like the converted army barracks in use in the US have been constructed, largely by the students and staff themselves. There has not been sufficient heat in cold weather; hence classes must be interrupted for exercises to keep warm. Facilities are very inadequate; laboratory equipment and a library are badly needed. One object of source's visit to the US has been to try to obtain books for the University. Most students are able to make some use of English books; indeed, there has never been an adequate supply of books in Korea for modern university use. Previously a good deal of Japanese material was used, and many Korean educators have completed their university training in Japanese universities. There is now a deliberate effort to shift toward Western standards, methods of instruction, and materials. Source believes that the US could do much to create sympathy for American principles of government by positive assistance to Korean education at a time when it is naturally turning to us for guidance and help.
2. Despite difficulties the student body has grown, the students are enthusiastic and earnest, willing to make great personal sacrifices to obtain university training. They participate actively in student government.
3. The public school system is apparently not public in the sense of being fully tax supported. Parents of children attending pay tuition fees, but efforts are made to find sponsors for poor children.

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Attendance is quite general, and the incidence of illiteracy is decreasing. Korea has long had a strong literary tradition, and several hundred years ago produced an enormous encyclopedia which was the most advanced compendium of knowledge in the Orient. Appreciation of the value of education is general; great sacrifices are made by the peasantry to attend schools. There is, however, still a large portion of the agricultural population which lacks sufficient education for effective political participation.

4. Asked whether there had been sufficient technical education to develop a group of engineers and technicians capable of restoring and operating Korean industries, source answered affirmatively. Industries were, of course, located largely in North Korea and the northern part of South Korea in the war zone, and have been to a large extent destroyed. They were originally developed under Japanese supervision and management, but it is not true that they could not be restored and carried on without foreign supervision. Already many factories within South Korea have been restored to active production. A large number of Koreans have enough technical training for such work. It is of course desirable that such training should be intensified. Korea, to be sure, is predominantly an agricultural economy and produces an exportable rice surplus, most of which goes to Japan. Continuing trade with Japan is natural and desirable, but Korea can develop industries which will reduce dependence upon Japan for finished products. Any resumption of Japanese economic domination would be disastrous.
5. Speaking of Korean defensive military potential, source said he thought the country could maintain military forces of about one million, although so large a force would be a serious economic burden if it had to be maintained long. He supposed, however, that if the country could be reunited with the help of United Nation forces and the Chinese could be expelled, it would be possible for Korea to develop forces sufficient to hold a line at the Yalu, which he considers readily defensible. If I understood him correctly, he thought this could be done with a relatively small force, about 25-thousand. Of course, source is not a military man and is only reflecting things he has heard or read in these remarks. He believed a rapid withdrawal of US forces would be very unwise, indicating that the training of Korean forces was proceeding well, but would require many more months.
6. With respect to conclusion of the Korean war, source felt that the only sound solution must be based upon fulfillment of the United Nations' objectives of expulsion of foreign aggressors and unification of North and South Korea. He was quite optimistic of the ability of North and South Koreans to reconcile their differences under one government, once they are relieved of foreign intervention.

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In his view the North Koreans are not thoroughly indoctrinated Communists, but like the Chinese responded to relatively simple appeals like land reform and education. Their interest is not in a system of government like the USSR, but only in a liberal agrarian program. They would be satisfied with a vigorous program of land distribution like that contemplated by the government of South Korea. Furthermore, he pointed out that in a unified Korea, the Communist element could not constitute a large proportion and would not be in the majority even in the North. There were over seven-million in the North before the war, and about half fled to South Korea. Of those who remained, it is not likely that all are Communists. Since he expects that in the event of peace with unification all these refugees would return to the North to their own homes, he believes, the Communists would be in the minority there. Certainly they could not elect a considerable number of deputies to the National Assembly. He believes there are very few Communists in South Korea other than some undercover workers, and the population there is now about 20 million.

7. Source considers the democratic tradition quite strong in Korea, and spoke confidently of their capacity to carry on a democratic regime in a united, independent, Korea. In response to a question whether the present government of South Korea, and specifically President Syngman Rhee, are not something less than democratic in methods, he seemed disinclined in a public meeting to comment fully; he spoke of Rhee as having been trained in Western democracy and having long led the fight for Korean independence and republican government. He referred to his struggle against Japanese control, and seems to feel still that the Japanese may be a greater menace to Korea than the Communists. However, in a conversation later, he admitted that Rhee used his special power for personal aggrandizement, had controlled elections so that no genuine choices were open to the electorate, and had throttled the Assembly. He felt that despite his age, he still hoped to remain in power by undemocratic methods, and that he is a serious obstacle to a liberal, democratic regime.
8. When asked whether there were other political leaders of more liberal, democratic tendency who might succeed him, source said that there were some, but that there was a considerable danger the mantle might fall upon Lee Bum Suk, who had the traits of a conservative, personal dictator without the cultivation and urbanity of President Rhee. He mentioned his relative, Shin Ni-kee, as a conservative leader of benevolent tendencies, but doubted that he would emerge to a position of leadership. He seemed to prefer Doctor George Paik, but did not suggest that he had much chance to obtain the presidency. Apparently his preference is somewhat conditioned by the effectiveness of Paik's work in education, which is of course source's own special interest. Source referred to an article in The Reporter,

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20 Jan 53, p 21, entitled "After Rhee, Who?" as an essentially accurate analysis of political aspirants. Political parties, he felt, were tending toward a two-party pattern closely resembling ours, but there is still a large part of the population which does not participate actively in politics. Hence, the parties are not so broadly representative as ours. Source felt that there is a strong democratic sentiment in Korea and that under favorable circumstances the country will emerge with education and growing political consciousness as a democratic force in the Orient.

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